

**Investigating the genetics and agronomic traits  
associated with elevated grain Zn concentration in  
wheat**

**A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**By**

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**This thesis is dedicated to my family Rashid, Junaid, Nadir, Asjid and Rubab whose moral support in many ways and over many years helped me to pursue my goals.**

## Abbreviations

PS	: Phytosiderophores
NA	: Nicotianamine
G x E	: Genotype x Environment
EDXRF	: Energy Dispersive X-ray Fluorescence
AAS	: Atomic Absorption Spectrometry
CI	: Confidence Interval
DH	: Double Haploid
HPAN	: HarvestPlus Advance Nursery
ICP-OES	: Inductively Coupled Plasma–Optical Emission Spectrometry
LOD	: Logarithm of the odds
QTL	: Quantitative trait loci
XRF	: X-ray Fluorescence spectrometry
MAS	: Marker Assisted Selection
CIMMYT	: International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
SARDI	: South Australian Research and Development Institute
TGW	: Thousand Grains Weight

## Table of contents

<b>Abbreviations</b> -----	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of contents</b> -----	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> -----	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of figures</b> -----	<b>xi</b>
<b>Abstract</b> -----	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Acknowledgement</b> -----	<b>1</b>
<b>Declaration</b> -----	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Literature Review</b> -----	<b>3</b>
1.1 Introduction-----	3
1.1.1 The chemistry of zinc-----	4
1.1.2 Biochemical properties of Zinc-----	4
1.1.3 Zinc is both an essential and a toxic element-----	5
1.2 Zinc in the soils-----	6
1.2.1 Total Zinc Concentration in Soils-----	7
1.2.2 Zn in the Soil Solution-----	7
1.2.3 Factors affecting the Availability of Zinc in Soils to Plants-----	8
1.3 Zinc in the plants-----	8
1.4 Short distance transport (the absorption of Zn by roots)-----	8
1.5 Long distance transport-----	13

1.5.1	Transport within the xylem-----	13
1.5.2	Phloem Transport-----	14
1.5.3	Zn loading into grains-----	15
1.5.4	Source Sink relationship-----	16
1.6	Screening for Zn Efficiency-----	17
1.6.1	Factors regulating zinc efficiency of cereals-----	18
1.6.1.1	Root morphology-----	18
1.6.1.2	Rhizosphere-----	19
1.6.1.3	Changes in rhizosphere pH and redox potential-----	20
1.6.2	Breeding for Zn efficiency-----	20
1.6.3	Influence of high Zn reserve on Zn efficiency -----	21
1.6.4	Genotype x Environment interactions-----	23
1.7	Dust Contamination of Seeds-----	24
1.8	XRF and its application-----	25
1.9	QTL Mapping-----	26
2.0	Conclusion-----	29
	<b>Chapter 2: Study of phenotypic traits associated with grain Zn concentration in wheat-----</b>	<b>30</b>
2.1	Introduction-----	30
2.2	Materials and Methods-----	31

2.3 Results-----	33
2.3.1 Screening the full population-----	33
2.3.2 Selection of lines for study in glasshouse environment-----	35
2.3.3 Greenhouse study-----	39
Grain Zn concentration-----	39
Effect of applied Zn on other phenotypic traits, and examination of DH57--	41
Grain Zn content -----	45
2.4 Discussion-----	48
<b>Chapter 3: Cleaning grains for accurate micronutrient analysis-----</b>	<b>54</b>
3.1 Introduction-----	54
3.2. Materials and methods-----	56
3.2.1 Milling time study-----	56
3.2.2 Validation of 5 sec milling method on contaminated lines from two environments-----	57
3.2.3 Precision of QTL analysis-----	58
3.3 Results-----	58
3.3.1 Milling time study-----	58
3.3.2 Validation of 5 sec milling method on contaminated lines-----	65
3.3.3 Precision of QTL analysis-----	69

3.4 Discussion-----	73
---------------------	----

**Chapter 4: XRF analysis of grain – further validation and use in genetic mapping of grain Zn concentration-----77**

4.1: Introduction -----	77
-------------------------	----

4.2: Materials and Methods -----	78
----------------------------------	----

4.3: Results-----	79
-------------------	----

Validation -----	79
------------------	----

Mapping-----	81
--------------	----

4.4 Discussion -----	87
----------------------	----

4.5 Conclusion -----	89
----------------------	----

**Chapter 5 Further mapping of Zn density in Berkut x Krichauff, and in two additional mapping populations, Excalibur x Kukri and Kukri x RAC 875---90**

5.1 Introduction-----	90
-----------------------	----

5.2 Materials and Methods-----	91
--------------------------------	----

5.3 Results-----	92
------------------	----

<i>Concentration ranges</i> -----	92
-----------------------------------	----

<i>Mapping results</i> -----	92
------------------------------	----

5.4 Discussion-----	103
---------------------	-----

<b>Chapter 6 General Discussion</b>	<b>107</b>
6.1 Agronomic basis	107
6.2 Method development	108
6.3 Genetic basis	110
6.4 Recommendations for breeders	111
6.5 Future Work	113
<b>Chapter 7 References</b>	<b>114</b>



## List of Tables

<b>Table 1.1</b> Genes involved in Fe and Zn uptake in different plants-----	12
<b>Table 1.2</b> Lists of reported Zn QTLs in different double haploid wheat populations--	28
<b>Table 2.1</b> Mean and standard deviation values of grain Zn concentration ( $\text{mg kg}^{-1}$ ) grain yield ( $\text{kg ha}^{-1}$ ) and TGW (g) in 9 double haploid genotypes-----	36
<b>Table 2.2</b> Mean values of 4 replicates and standard deviation values of grain Zn concentration ( $\text{mg kg}^{-1}$ ) in double haploid genotypes from the Berkut x Krichauff DH population-----	41
<b>Table 2.3</b> Means of four replicates for 14 traits in 7 DH lines of the Berkut x Krichauff mapping population plus the two parents with and without applied soil Zn---- -----	42
<b>Table 2.4a</b> Pearson correlation among different traits measured in 9 double haploid wheat genotypes grown at adequate (i.e. without supplemental) Zn treatment-----	46
<b>Table 2.4b</b> Pearson correlation among different traits measured in 9 double haploid wheat genotypes grown at high (with supplemental) Zn treatment-----	47
<b>Table 3.1</b> Dry matter retention (%) among 2 non-contaminated and 3 contaminated genotypes after milling for different times-----	61
<b>Table 3.2</b> Concentration of Al, Fe and Zn in 2 clean and 3 contaminated genotypes after milling for different times-----	62
<b>Table 3.3</b> Averages changes in concentration of Al, Fe, and Zn in 3 categories of contaminated lines from Australia (Berkut x Krichauff population) -----	65
<b>Table 3.4</b> Average concentrations of Fe, Zn and Al among 240 wheat lines, before and after cleaning. Units are $\text{mg kg}^{-1}$ unless otherwise indicated-----	66

<b>Table 3.5</b> Ranking of 20 genotypes with reference of Fe and Zn concentrations before and after cleaning-----	68
<b>Table 3.6</b> QTLs for Fe concentration (% of dry weight) measured on the dirty <i>versus</i> clean grain of the Berkut x Krichauff doubled-haploid population grown at Roseworthy in 2009. -----	71
<b>Table 4.1</b> EDXRF conditions used for the analysis of Zn (Paltridge et al., 2012 b) -----	79
<b>Table 4.2</b> Data for Berkut x Krichauff validation population. Values are in mgkg <sup>-1</sup> , except for R <sup>2</sup> , the coefficient of determination. -----	80
<b>Table 4.3</b> Validation data of 200 HPAN lines of CIMMYT populations of year 2010. Values are in mgkg <sup>-1</sup> , except r <sup>2</sup> which is percentage-----	81
<b>Table 4.4</b> QTL detected in the Berkut x Krichauff population (grain samples from the 2007 growing season ICP screening) -----	83
<b>Table 4.5</b> QTL detected in the Berkut x Krichauff population (grain samples from the 2007 growing season, EDX screening) -----	83
<b>Table 5.1</b> Zn concentrations in grain of three mapping populations of wheat grown in the field grown at Roseworthy Agricultural College. -----	92
<b>Table 5.2</b> QTL detected for grain Zn in 3 mapping populations grown at Roseworthy Agriculture College in 2009 and 2006 -----	

## List of figures

<b>Figure 2.1</b> Relationship between Zn concentration and <b>grain yield</b> in replication 1 of Berkut x Krichauff, 2007-----	34
<b>Figure 2.2</b> Relationship between Zn concentration and <b>TGW</b> in replication 1 of Berkut x Krichauff, 2007-----	34
<b>Figure 2.3</b> Relationship between grain yield and TGW in replication 1 of Berkut x Krichauff, 2007-----	35
<b>Figure 2.4</b> Relationship between Zn concentration, grain yield and TGW in the means of replication 1, 2 and 3 of Berkut x Krichauff, 2007-----	37
<b>Figure 2.5</b> Relationship between grain yield and TGW in means of replication 1, 2 and 3 of Berkut x Krichauff, 2007-----	38
<b>Figure 2.6</b> Relationship between field Zn concentration and glasshouse Zn at low Zn treatment (i.e. without supplemental Zn) -----	39
<b>Figure 2.7</b> Relationship between field Zn concentration and glasshouse Zn at high Zn treatment (i.e. with supplemental Zn) -----	40
<b>Figure 2.8</b> Relationship between Zn concentration, grain yield and TGW in DH lines grown at adequate level of Zn in glasshouse -----	43
<b>Figure 2.9</b> Relationship between Zn concentration, grain yield and TGW in 9 DH lines grown at high level of Zn in glasshouse-----	44
<b>Figure 3.1</b> Photographs of seeds in DH135, DH57 and DH35, before and after milling for 5 sec showing removal of hair-----	63
<b>Figure 3.2</b> Photograph of seed coat after cleaning for 40 s, with erosion of the seed coat clearly visible-----	64

<b>Figure 3.3</b> Averages changes in concentration of Al, Fe, and Zn in different categories of 240 contaminated wheat lines before and after cleaning. -----	70
<b>Figure 3.4</b> Chromosomal locations and LOD scores of Fe QTLs in Berkut x Krichauff (2009) before and after cleaning-----	72
<b>Figure 4.1</b> Correlation between ICP- and XRF-determined Zn concentration in wheat population of B x K 2007 -----	80
<b>Figure 4.2</b> Correlation between ICP- and XRF-determined Zn concentration in HPAN wheat population-----	80
<b>Figure 4.3</b> Chromosomal location of QTL for Zn in Bx K 2007 in ICP screening---	84
<b>Figure 4.4</b> Chromosomal location of QTL on 5B chromosome for Zn in Bx K 2007 in XRF screening-----	85
<b>Figure 4.5</b> Chromosomal location of QTL on 5D chromosome for Zn in Bx K 2007 in XRF screening-----	86
<b>Figure 5.1</b> Frequency distribution graphs for Zn concentration in three double haploid populations-----	93
<b>Figure 5.2</b> Chromosomal locations and LOD scores of Zn QTL in Berkut x Krichauff (2009)-----	95
<b>Figure 5.3</b> Chromosomal locations of Zn QTLs on 5D in Berkut x Krichauff (2009) --- -----	96
<b>Figure 5.4</b> Chromosomal locations of Zn QTLs on 7A in Berkut x Krichauff (2009) --- -----	97
<b>Figure 5.5</b> Chromosomal locations of Zn QTLs in wheat population of Excalibur x Kukri-----	99
<b>Figure 5.6</b> Chromosomal location of QTLs in wheat population (Kukri x RAC875) ---- -----	100

**Figure 5.6** Chromosomal location of QTLs in wheat population (Kukri x RAC875) ----  
-----101

**Figure 5.6** Chromosomal location of QTLs in wheat population (Kukri x RAC875) ----  
-----102

## Abstract

Biofortification of wheat and other food crops with Zn is an important and high-priority research issue. This project focused on the genetic and agronomic factors that control grain Zn concentration in wheat. Understanding this may make it possible to increase Zn in wheat for biofortification purposes. Specific aims were (i) to identify wheat genotypes that differ in grain Zn concentration, (ii) to understand agronomic traits that are relevant to Zn accumulation in grain (iii) to conduct mapping studies to find genetic loci which confer high Zn concentration.

A number of genotypes of Berkut x Krichauff were grown to investigate Zn concentration and its relationship with morphological traits. This study confirmed a negative association of grain yield with Zn concentration. Low Zn lines which had low Zn concentration in the field, had high grain Zn concentration in the glasshouse which was considered to be due to dust contamination and a modified Kett mill, has been used to eliminate dust contamination but the results have shown that Fe concentration and ranking are greatly affected by soil contamination, whereas Zn concentration and ranking are not. A cleaning method was shown to be an important step prior to analysis for precise QTL analysis. The inconsistent results of low Zn lines were probably not a consequence of soil contamination. The results were due to inconsistent Zn levels in the grain itself. Because there was no correlation between field trials and glasshouse results, the focus of study was switched to the genetics of grain Zn concentration.

There was a need for increased knowledge of the genetic basis of Zn density in wheat and QTL analysis is considered a powerful strategy to do this. ICP-OES analysis is mostly used for QTL analysis which is very expensive. XRF was proposed as an alternate method for elemental analysis. Importantly, despite the greater errors of XRF results than ICP-OES results, XRF results allowed the identification of the same number of QTLs as ICP-OES, in the Berkut x Krichauff population in year 2007.

Berkut x Krichauff 2009, Excalibur x Kukri, and Kukri x RAC 875, populations were used for validation. In Berkut x Krichauff populations, two QTLs for Zn, located on 7A (LOD 4.9) and 5D (LOD 3.9), were identified and the QTL on 5D was a new one not reported in any published studies, whereas the QTL on 7A was also found in two other mapping populations and in four other studies reported in literature. These two new Zn QTLs were not co-located with grain size while in the other two populations, Zn QTLs were found but co-located with grain size and the Zn-dense trait was associated with a smaller grain size and hence a concentrating effect. This trait is not desirable for plant breeding as it is associated with a lower yield. The Zn QTLs not associated with grain size can be used to further develop genetic markers which plant breeders can use to speed up the breeding of genotypes with a higher level of grain Zn.

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**Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.